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THE EXECUTIVE AND EDUCATION.

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HIGHER EDUCATION HAS THREE OBJECTIVES--TO TEACH THE STUDENT ABOUT HIMSELF, TO PREPARE HIM TO LIVE A WORTHY LIFE, AND TO PREPARE HIM TO EARN A LIVING. TO MEET THESE GOALS, THE INDUSTRIAL EXECUTIVE'S SPECIALIZED TRAINING IS SUPERIMPOSED ON A BROAD GENERAL EDUCATION WHICH PROVIDES HIM WITH HIS MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS, THE ABILITIES TO SPEAK AND WRITE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITH CLARITY AND FORCE AND TO COMMUNICATE IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE. GRADUATE TRAINING IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IS DESIRABLE BUT NOT INDISPENSIBLE. TO INTRODUCE THE YOUNG MAN TO EVERY PHASE OF THE COMPANY'S OPERATION AND TO HELP HIM KNOW ITS PEOPLE, MOST CORPORATIONS OFFER IN-COMPANY TRAINING. THE EXECUTIVE MUST CONTINUE SELF-EDUCATION THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE THROUGH READING AND INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES. MANY CORPORATIONS PROVIDE FORMAL STUDY PROGRAMS FOR MANAGEMENT IN COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITIES. THE EXECUTIVE ALSO HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO SUPPORT AND IMPROVE EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS, PARTICULARLY IN HIS OWN COMMUNITY, AND TO HELP IN THE TRAINING OF FUTURE EXECUTIVES BY OCCASIONALLY LECTURING TO A COLLEGE CLASS AND ANSWERING STUDENTS' QUESTIONS. EDUCATION AND BUSINESS CANNOT BE SEPARATED. THIS DOCUMENT IS CHAPTER THREE IN THE EXECUTIVE IN TRANSITION, AVAILABLE FROM THE MCGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY, NEW YORK. (AJ)

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# THE EXECUTIVE
## *in transition*

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chapter three

# THE EXECUTIVE

*and education*

There is seldom consensus among businessmen these days. That is the democratic way. On few questions, however, is there more difference of opinion than on that of what constitutes the best formal education for a young man who wishes to prepare himself for a career as an executive. Each of us seniors tends to rationalize what he himself did. Secretly we believe that our way was the best.

Such, certainly, is my bias. I was trained in the liberal arts, supplemented by law, and I have never regretted the sequence. I went to Harvard during the wide-open period of course selection. During my four years as an undergraduate, the only subject required for an A.B. degree was English composition. As a consequence, I followed no guide but impulse in choosing my studies: Greek, Latin, elementary French, poetry, literature, philosophy, economics, history, government, geology, and so on to a total of seventeen. To a man with that background the contrast today is startling. Today's student must soon select the field of concentration that will constitute his major effort, and the one subject he almost certainly will not be required to take is English composition.

I did not reach a career decision until the spring



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of my senior year, when I made up my mind that I would enter Harvard Law School. Had my father or some other adviser insisted that I prepare myself in college for employment in the steel industry, I surely would have concentrated on engineering and metallurgy. I now believe that that would have been a mistake. Certainly no one would have told me then that such training alone seldom equips a man to advance to the top in the steel industry. This is not meant to downgrade the importance of technical education, but rather to emphasize that too narrow a focus is dangerous for a student with a full life ahead of him.

As I see it, when the privilege of pursuing higher education comes to a young man he should understand that it has three distinct objectives.

The first of these objectives is to teach the student about himself. He goes to college for the purpose of exploring the resources of his own mind and personality, and by trial and error to determine the full range of his talents. He can accomplish this only by accepting a wide diversity of intellectual challenges. Otherwise, he might go through his entire life without discovering important latent capabilities he was never aware of in high school. He certainly cannot take a full inventory of his abilities by choosing only the easy courses, and those he

likes best. He must discipline himself to undertake difficult tasks, for many such will come to him in later life.

This is why I am disturbed at the current emphasis on high marks. Parents watch the report cards eagerly, and hard-working students covet high grades in the hope of winning scholarships or special grants for later graduate studies. Not infrequently, the young man selects courses not on the basis of what will best serve to open his mind and widen his horizons, but rather on that of immediate self-interest. His immaturity is revealed in his assumption that what he likes will necessarily give him the best education.

The second objective of higher education is to prepare the student to live a worthy life, as distinct from earning a livelihood. If he is to have intellectual satisfactions in his mature life he must know how to find them in areas of thought that have nothing to do with his job. He cannot play his part in preserving our democratic way of life unless he has the capacity for insight into political and social problems that lie outside his job activities. If he is to look outward in his life and not just be locked up within himself, the process should begin in college.

Last in my list of three objectives for the proc-

esses of higher education is the realistic one of preparing the student to make a living. The key to his ultimate success rests on his ability to choose a particular subject, even though it may not be his favorite, and master it. Business chooses young men not so much for what they know as for their proven capacity to learn.

I say this with full awareness that ours is rapidly becoming the age of the specialist. Brains are in short supply, and the competition to recruit them is keen in every calling. Scientists, for example, sense the shortage so acutely that a movement is under way to persuade teachers at the secondary school level to influence their students to decide, even before they enter college, on a career in science.

This concept I simply cannot accept, because it may endanger the future of the adolescent. No high school student can possibly know enough about either himself or the world to take such a vital decision wisely. In my view, the final choice of a career should be postponed as long as possible in the hope that it may be based upon mature judgment. Then, when the right time comes, the young man should take his decision strictly on his own, free of external influences, including that of his parents. No father, in my opinion, can commit a

greater sin than to compel his son to follow in his own footsteps. By doing so, against the young man's will, the father may well plunge his son into a lifetime of frustration.

Obviously, specialists are vital today in business. If we are to make as much progress in the next fifty years as we have in the last fifty, industry must have executives with advanced training in a wide range of intellectual disciplines. But it seems clear to me that this specialization, for both the man's and the company's sake, should be superimposed upon a general education acquired earlier.

Let the student first lay a broad foundation at the undergraduate level, and then take his intensive work in his graduate years, just as in law and medicine. From the point of view of the student, he may gamble everything on the narrow focus of a single subject, only to find that his specialty makes no contribution to the career into which the accidents of life have plunged him. If he is chief chemist at a steel mill in Pittsburgh, and the doctor says that his wife's health requires her to live in Arizona, he may wind up as an insurance salesman in Phoenix. From the corporation's viewpoint, breadth is indispensable if, as the executive approaches senior levels, he is to be capable of assuming responsibility in many unrelated fields. For example, nothing that

happens in a research laboratory prepares a man to deal broadly with the subtleties of human relationships. Science is vital to our progress, but technology alone cannot preserve our democratic form of society or the system of production based upon private initiative.

If I were asked to name the one skill most important to the young man leaving college hopeful of achieving executive status in industry, I would say without a moment's hesitation that it is the capacity to speak and write the English language with clarity and force. No idea, however brilliant, has value for society unless it can be communicated to others. Without this talent there can be no effective leadership. Every hour of the day the executive must project his thoughts into the minds of those about him. Whether they be his superiors, his subordinates, his customers, government officials, or the general public, he must be able to say what he thinks, and say it well.

Just looming over the business horizon, too, is the need for still another basic skill, one that would have been scoffed at in the early years, or even in my own generation, but will soon be a positive must: namely, a working knowledge of another language. The outward thrust of American business into the economies of other nations is bound to go

forward vigorously, and no enterprise, however insular it may now seem, can escape the impact. The resourceful executive must keep himself closely informed on what is going on overseas, even if he himself does not have a direct foreign assignment. He must travel widely, he must learn the value of exchanging ideas with men of entirely different background, and he must keep abreast of both the technical and political developments in the areas served by his foreign competitors. To do this intelligently he should be able to read and speak passably at least one of the other world languages—French, Spanish, or German. His counterpart overseas, no matter what his native tongue, will almost certainly be fluent in one of these, even if he does not have English. This additional skill can be acquired at any time of life by a disciplined mind, but the place to begin is in college.

A year or two of graduate training in business administration is certainly highly desirable for the prospective trainee in executive work if his finances will permit, though it is by no means indispensable as graduate training is in law or medicine. First of all it will introduce him to the realms of accounting and finance, which usually cannot be done at the undergraduate level. Furthermore, the case method of instruction based on actual problems drawn from

current industrial situations—a method successfully pioneered by the Harvard Business School—can give him direct insight into the processes of corporate decision making. Here, however, a caution needs to be expressed, one which is fully recognized by the faculties in business schools, although they have yet to find the answer. To wit, the graduate student in business administration sometimes becomes too sophisticated for his own good. When he finally gets his first job and arrives in his new surroundings, he is apt to be a little too sure of himself. He exudes a sense of conscious superiority, condescends a bit toward his associates, and finds his boss a pretty unenlightened fellow who is still stupidly following ways long since outmoded by business school standards. His graduate degree needs a slight added touch of humility.

Actually he has just reached the point where his final instruction begins. In business one learns by doing. His first task is to inform himself, as fully and rapidly as possible, about every phase of his company's operations. He must begin with its production processes, learning to understand the specialized functions of its equipment and to speak the vernacular of its technology. He must then acquaint himself with the particular requirements of the markets which the corporation serves, and become fa-

miliar with its methods of distribution. He must learn his company's sales techniques, its advertising practices, and its methods of production scheduling. He must know costs and their relationship to prices, and must then begin informing himself on the corporation's financial problems. Above all, he must know its people, and strive to establish a wide acquaintanceship with those who will become his colleagues as the years pass. He cannot apply the skills which he has acquired during his education until he has mastered the subject matter before him, both material and human.

To meet these needs, most large corporations today offer a year of in-company training to a carefully selected group of college graduates, during which the recruits move from department to department, receiving instruction from the executives in charge. This achieves two purposes. On the one hand, the young man is directly exposed to every phase of the company's business; on the other hand, responsible seniors can form and communicate to top management a wide diversity of evaluations of his suitability for future executive assignments. In terms of ultimate impact upon the candidate's future, this year probably does even more for him than a year of graduate training in business administration. If he has both, he is doubly well prepared.

Such a program, however, submits many senior executives to a very severe test. They have not been trained as teachers. A man can display high competence in his own daily performance without having thought through just why he does what he does, and this weakness can become cruelly exposed when he is called upon to instruct others. The final step in such a man's re-education comes after participating in such a training program, when he is asked to visit colleges himself and select the prospective trainees. He must then employ the insight gained from his experience in on-the-job instructing to the problem of identifying young men who possess the qualities required for sound management.

But all this is only the beginning. The executive who looks to the future must continue the process of self-education throughout his entire career—including retirement. To assist in this process of progressive self-education, many of our enlightened corporations now provide extensive formal study programs for those who are rising in the management hierarchy, often in cooperation with a nearby college or university. The company bears the expense, the college provides the instructors, and the executive gives his time during his off hours. If he is engaged in production, and is assigned to the day shift, he may do it in the evenings, or if he works

on the night shift it will be open to him in the daytime. Such study is especially valuable for those who have not had technical training but whose responsibilities require precise knowledge of a particular field in science or engineering. Conversely, though this is unfortunately less common, the technician can profitably be offered courses in the liberal arts, such as literature, political science, economics, and English composition.

Soon I hope to see this planning for breadth advance to the point where instruction will also be offered in foreign languages, a practice which is already widespread in British industry. Such continuing education has already produced some astonishing results. Cases are known, for example, where the man's intellectual interests have become so stimulated that he has taken a leave of absence and, with the company's help, enrolled again in a university and gone on to take a graduate degree.

Even more important, however, than what the corporation does by way of refresher courses or further formal education is what the individual does on his own to expand his horizons, and sustain a continuing intellectual growth. As a matter of top priority he must strive constantly to keep abreast of the new problems that face the society of which he is a part.

Above all, he must keep up his reading, and by this I do not mean just the daily paper, the *Wall Street Journal*, or the publications of his technical society. Without the prodding stimulus of an inquiring mind he will never achieve strong leadership. No matter how complex his daily schedule may be, he must find time to let his mind guide him into new areas of thought.

In my active years, I knew many a businessman who did not read a book a year, and I am sure that there must be such today. They intend to do so soon, but they keep putting it off until their capacity to embark upon new adventures of the mind completely atrophies. This not only makes them colorless as citizens but eventually brings them to the ultimate catastrophe of life in a mental vacuum when they are overtaken by retirement.

The mature executive's obligation to take an active part in the training and continuing education of those on the company payroll is obvious, since it bears directly upon the future effectiveness of his organization in a highly competitive economy. Other companies are doing it, and his must too or it will fall behind in the race to recruit and retrain brains. What is less clear is his responsibility to support and help improve the media of education in the community about him. Here his motivation

is not direct self-interest, but the repayment of a debt he owes to society.

Like so many other imperatives in life, this one begins at home. The executive must not leave to his wife the entire responsibility of watching over the education of his children. His management experience may be urgently needed in his local school system, and he must make it available by being active in his parent-teacher association or serving on the school board. He can hardly permit himself to criticize the quality of instruction his child receives if he is unwilling to take a hand in selecting the teachers and seeing to it that they are adequately paid. Likewise, as his youngsters go on to high school or leave home for preparatory school, he must stand ready to assist in maintaining high standards in secondary education.

Colleges and universities certainly have every right to look to him for help if he persistently looks to them to provide him with exceptional management candidates for his company. But the relationship has a personal side as well. If the executive himself is a college graduate, he would be insensitive indeed not to recognize a strong moral obligation. If his institution is state-supported, it was the taxpayers who made his education possible; if privately endowed, he surely must know that the tui-

tion he paid did not even come close to meeting the actual cost of the training his diploma represents. The high privilege that came to him was made possible by the sacrifice and generosity of earlier generations. He must do likewise for those who are to follow.

His annual gifts to his alma mater, and financial support to education by his corporation, are still not the whole answer, however. I hold the revolutionary view that the executive must go still further and actually take part in the educational process itself. America badly needs a new sense of partnership between businessmen and professors. At present they seldom even see one another. In fact, they hardly speak the same language, so great is the barrier that separates them. Each needs to gain a far better understanding of the problems of the other.

I want to see the executive appear on campus more often, not just for the big game or his class reunion, and not just as a member of the board of trustees charged with fund raising, but as a member of the educational team itself. When a course is being given in some subject in which he has competence, such as economics or business administration, let him from time to time actually take the class for a day. Let him speak for 30 minutes, and then answer questions from the students for the balance

of the period. If he does this I can promise him that he will have one of the most exhilarating experiences of his life. It will be chastening as well; to have his ideas vigorously challenged by eager young minds will cause him to reappraise many of his convictions. But he cannot fail to sense the unique impact he may make on the group before him, nor can he fail to realize how deeply the faculty will have appreciated his coming.

If our nation is to go forward as rapidly and as far as we all wish it to, education cannot be separated from business, nor business from education.